

The Wendell School District #232 recognizes that students who are homeless or in transition face unique educational barriers and challenges. The district endeavors to create a safe and stable learning environment where all students have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education.

The district will ensure that all children and youths who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence are provided with equal access to the same free, appropriate public education (FAPE), including a public preschool education, as is provided to other children and youths.

The district will ensure that all homeless students are provided with equal access to all education programs and services needed to meet the same challenging state and district academic achievement standards to which all students are held, and are not segregated or discriminated against on the basis of their status as homeless.

The district will undertake steps to eliminate barriers to the enrollment, attendance, or success of homeless children and youths in school.

## **DEFINITIONS**

“Enroll” and “enrollment” means attending classes and participating fully in all school activities.

“Homeless children and youths” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

1. Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, campgrounds, or trailer parks due to a lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters.
2. Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
3. Children and youths who are living in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting.
4. Migratory children and youths who are living in circumstances described above.
5. Unaccompanied Youth who are living in circumstances described above.

“Immediate” means without delay.

“Local attendance area school” means any public school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

“Local or district liaison” is the staff person designated by the district who is responsible for carrying out the duties assigned to the local homeless education liaison by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

“School of origin” means the school the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

“Unaccompanied youth” means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, who meets the definition of homeless as defined above. Unaccompanied youths include young people who have been denied housing by their families, run away from home, and/or been abandoned by parents or guardians.

## **SCHOOL SELECTION**

Each child or youth identified as homeless has the right to remain at his or her school of origin or enroll in any public school that housed students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

School selection for students experiencing homelessness will be made on a case-by-case basis and according to the best interest of the child or youth. In making the best interest determination, the district will, to the extent feasible, and presume a homeless student in the school of origin is in the child’s best interest, unless doing so is contrary to the wishes of the student’s parent or guardian or the unaccompanied youth.

Students may remain at their school of origin the entire time they are homeless and until the end of any academic year in which they become permanently housed. The same applies if a student loses his or her housing during the summer.

In the case of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, the district liaison will assist in placement and enrollment decisions, give priority to the views of the youth, and provide notice of the right to appeal the best interest determination that is contrary to the youth’s request.

The school selection determination will be based on a student-centered, individualized analysis of factors related to the child’s safety and educational well-being. Factors to be considered in determining the best interest of the student and feasibility of school of origin placement include, but are not limited to: age of the child or youth; commute distance and the impact it may have on the student’s education; personal safety issues; the student’s need for special instruction or programming; length of anticipated stay in a temporary shelter or other temporary location; and time remaining in the school year. Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin, will not be considered in determining feasibility.

Priority will be given to the parent/guardian's request.

## **ENROLLMENT**

A school that has been selected based on the best interest determination must immediately enroll the homeless child or youth, even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment.

Enrollment may not be denied or delayed due to the lack of any document or condition normally required for enrollment including:

- Proof of residency
- Transcripts or school records
- Immunization or other medical records
- Proof of guardianship
- Birth certificate
- Unpaid school fees
- Lack of school supplies
- Lack of clothing that conforms to dress code
- Any factor related to the student's living situation

The enrolling school will immediately contact the school last attended by the student to obtain relevant academic or other records. Initial placement of students whose records are not immediately available will be made based on information gathered from the student, parent or guardian, and previous schools or teachers. If a child or youth needs to obtain immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the local homeless liaison will assist in obtaining the immunizations or records. Any student record ordinarily kept by a school will be maintained so that it is available in a timely fashion when the student enters a new school or school district.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths will be informed of the right to transportation before they select a school for attendance. At the request of a parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, transportation will be provided to and from the school of origin. Transportation will be provided for the entire time the student has a right to attend that school, including during pending disputes.

It is this district's policy that inter-district disputes will not result in a homeless student missing school. If such a dispute arises, the district will arrange transportation and immediately bring the matter to the attention of the State Coordinator for Homeless Education.

## **SERVICES**

Students experiencing homelessness will be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the selected school. A student who ceases to be homeless may continue to receive services until the end of the period of time for which the service was originally intended, which may be the end of the school year or the end of a program cycle.

Services provided to homeless students include:

- Public preschool programs; e.g., Head Start
- Title IA services
- Educational services for which the student meets eligibility criteria; e.g., special education and related services and programs for English language learners
- Vocational and technical education programs
- Gifted and talented programs
- Before- and after-school programs
- Free Meals
- Transportation

When applying any district policy regarding tardiness or absences, any tardiness or absence related to a child or youth's living situation will be excused.

### **Title I, Part A**

All homeless students are automatically eligible for services under Title I, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act regardless of whether they live in a Title I attendance area or meet the eligibility requirements.

### **Free Meals**

Any child identified as homeless by the local liaison automatically qualifies for free school meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. They do not have to complete an application. The local liaison or shelter director will create a list of students who are eligible for free meals, note the effective eligibility dates, sign the form, and give it to the school nutrition program office for immediate processing.

A homeless student who is declared eligible for free meals remains eligible for the rest of the school year, even if the student's homeless status changes.

## **Preschool**

The district will ensure that children identified as homeless receive priority enrollment in preschool programs operated by the district, including exempting homeless children from waiting lists. Homeless children with disabilities will be referred for preschool services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

## **LOCAL HOMELESS EDUCATION LIAISON**

The superintendent or designee will designate a local liaison for homeless children and youths and their families. The local liaison will serve as one of the primary contacts between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, and other service providers.

The responsibilities of the liaison include, but are not limited to, ensuring:

1. All homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel through coordination with other entities and agencies.
2. Ensure that all district personnel receive annual professional and other support related to the McKinney-Vento Act.
3. All homeless children and youths enroll in and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed as non-homeless students in the district.
4. Homeless families, children, and youths receive educational services for which they are eligible, including services through Head Start programs, (including Early Head Start programs) early intervention services under part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and other preschool programs administered by the District.
5. Parents/guardians of homeless students are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in that education.
6. Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youths are informed and assisted in accessing transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin or to the selected school.

7. Eligibility, school selection, or enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with “Dispute Resolution Process,” below.
8. Public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youths is disseminated in locations frequented by parents/guardians of such students, and unaccompanied students including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to the parents/guardians of homeless students and unaccompanied students;
9. All homeless families, children and youth receive referrals to health, dental, mental health, housing, substance abuse, and other appropriate services.
10. Unaccompanied Homeless Youth:
  - a. Are enrolled in school;
  - b. Have opportunities to meet the same challenging state academic standards as the State established for other students;
  - c. Are provided with college and career counseling; and
  - d. Are informed of their status as independent students under 20 USC§1087 vv(d), and that such student may obtain assistance from the District Liaison to obtain verification of such status for purposed of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

## **DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS**

If a dispute arises over any issue covered in this policy;

1. The homeless child or youth will be immediately enrolled in the requested school until the dispute is resolved. The student will also have the right to continue all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I, Part A services while the dispute is pending.
2. A written explanation of the decision regarding eligibility, school selection or enrollment and notice of the right to appeal will be promptly provided to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth. Such notice will be in language the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth can understand and will include an appeal form and a summary of the dispute resolution process. In addition to the written determination, the district will provide the parent/guardian or UHY with the district McKinney-Vento Appeal Packet, which includes a copy of their rights, an explanation of the appeal process, and dispute documents.
3. The parent/guardian, or unaccompanied youth shall be referred to the Local Homeless Education Liaison upon being informed of the parent/guardian or students’ desire to

make an appeal, the liaison shall gather any additional related documents and, submit the dispute packet to the designated district team, who will respond in writing to the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth within 10 days.

4. If an agreement cannot be reached between the parties regarding the dispute, the district will promptly seek further assistance from the State Coordinator for Homeless Education who will follow how the student's best interests will be served. All parties will be expeditiously informed of the State's determination in writing and such decision will constitute final resolution of the dispute.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The local liaison will provide guidance and training for all district and school personnel on the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and this policy *at least once a year*. Training will be designed to assist staff in identifying signs of homelessness, increase staff awareness of homelessness and capacity to respond to specific problems in the education of homeless children and youths, heighten the understanding and sensitivity of personnel to the needs of homeless children and youths and the rights of such children and youths under the Act, facilitate immediate enrollment, and ensure compliance with this policy.

Training will incorporate field specific components. For example, school enrollment staff, secretaries, and principals will understand the immediate enrollment requirements; and cafeteria managers will understand the categorical eligibility for free school meals for homeless students.

The liaison will also obtain from every school the name and contact information of a building liaison. Building liaisons will receive training from the local liaison and will lead and coordinate their school's compliance with this policy.

## **COORDINATION**

The local liaison will coordinate and collaborate with the Idaho State Coordinator for Homeless Education, as well as community and school personnel who are responsible for the providing of education and related services to homeless students. These shall include public and private service providers in the community, housing and placement agencies, the district transportation department, local liaisons in neighboring districts, and other organizations and agencies as needed and appropriate to provide more effective and comprehensive services to homeless children and youth and their families. Such coordination shall include collecting and providing to the State Coordinator the reliable, valid and comprehensive data needed to meet the requirements of 42 USC§11432(f)(1) and (3).

## **POLICY REVIEW**

The district will review and revise any policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youths in schools. In reviewing and revising such policies, consideration will be given to issues concerning transportation, immunization, residency, birth certificates, school records and other documentation, guardianship. And accepting/granting partial credit for completed coursework. Special attention will be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless children and youths who are not currently attending school.

## **NOTICE**

Information regarding this policy will be distributed to all students upon enrollment and at the beginning of each school year in the student handbook. Public notice regarding the educational rights of children and youths identified as homeless will be posted in the district office and in every school in the district, as well as disseminated in other places where children, youths, and families who are homeless receive services, including family and youth shelters, motels, campgrounds, welfare departments, health departments, and other social service agencies.



## **LEGAL REFERENCES:**

Idaho Code Section 33-1404

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§11431 *et. seq.*, as authorized by Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015).

Elementary & Secondary Act- Title I, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C §6301 *et. seq.*, reauthorized in 2015.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §1400 *et. seq.* (2004)

Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act. Of 2004, P.L. 108-265 (2004)

Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, P.I. 110-134 (2007)

Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (Perkins V), 20 U.S.C. § 2031, 2032, 2322, 2323 (2018)

**ADOPTED:** October 20, 2009

**AMENDED:** February 17, 2015, October 15, 2019, December 2019

